*The Fall of Thacta:* Shataon Scenes

*Shataon and Bartalameo (prologue)*

Fifty miles to the east a man knelt on the ground of a wide-open field. It was now nightfall. He was dressed in a long tan shirt, a burgundy sleeveless coat, a golden sash, brown pants, with leather wrappings around his feet. His face was covered with a hood and a dark cloak draped his figure. Underneath that hood he had dark piercing eyes and silver hair. A figure cloaked in a black robe appeared suddenly before him.

“I know what you want Bartalameo, and I can provide it,” he said as he grinned. “I have seen your heart, and it is mine.”

Bartalameo looked at the figure. He looked troubled. As he stared into those eyes, it was as if all the light in the world had vanished. It made Bartalameo quiver; he could feel the presence of Evil in this one, like he could never feel before. He thought for sure that he was about to be destroyed. If there was ever a being who defined fear, it was the person in front of him now. A dark aura protruded around this man that destroyed hope.

“Who are you?” he inquired, his voice barely more than a whisper.

“I, am your brother,” responded the cloaked figure, the ground trembled as he spoke.

“And what is it, then, that I want?” Bartalameo questioned, knowing that he could never want anything that this man offered, if he were indeed a man.

“You want the same as many before you. Power, glory, honor, I have all of it, and it can be yours,” the cloaked man replied. Bartalameo stared at him. The appeal of power and glory was great, but Bartalameo had given up those things long ago, when he joined his fellow brethren of the Church. The cloaked man reached his hand out.

“All you have to do is bow down and worship me.”

Bartalameo pondered for a minute and then stated, “I know who you are. You were cast out from our Father.” Light rose through Bartalameo as he stood up and made his stand against his adversary. “The despised of the earth, Lucim, also known as the Devil, or Shataon. How do you have any power?”

“I have control over this people. They are mine. All of their desires, their gluttony, their lusts, are spawned from me. You too can rule all and become one of my Chosen ones,” he seemed eager to force this upon him, and smiled warmly at him.

“I, am one of the Chosen of my Father. I have been set apart by Sammuel as an Apostle of our Lord, and you think you can make me join you?” he challenged.

“No, I don’t think I can make you join me. You have to choose. Live poor and despised all of your life, or live as a King. These people will be mine and lest you join me, you will be destroyed.”

“If I am killed, then I will join my brethren in the kingdom of my Father,” Bartalameo returned. He stood up, “I will not partake of anything you have to offer, now be gone!” He waved him away.

Shataon put his hand on Bartalameo and smirked. Bartalameo shuttered.

“Well, in time you will see differently,” he said as he disappeared in thin air. Bartalameo looked troubled as he disappeared. He had not felt that hand, but he did feel the darkness that surrounded it. He again knelt on the ground.

“Am I the Betrayer?” he asked no one in particular. “Will I betray my brethren for power? I thought myself beyond temporal things, but I seem to have much to learn. That encounter has left me troubled.”

Suddenly, a wave of light spread throughout the field Bartalameo was at. He stood abruptly.

“The King is dead.” He stood. “I must seek out Sammuel at once.” From his cloak, he produced a small flat stone circle. He clasped it in both of his hands. A portal appeared five feet in front of him, and he proceeded into it.

*Shataon and Chohan (Prologue)*

Chohan the Destroyer surveyed the destruction before him in the fields of Jourhan. Dressed in a black cloak his face and body was covered. His skin was pale. His yellow eyes the only feature of his face to be seen in the darkness. He saw that the battle was intense. He wasn’t expecting Kyla to have to fight anyone today. He surveyed where the black liquid was on the ground and thought, *it looks like Kyla had his hands full. Not many could do this to him. The Pulsing Light of the King passed by earlier today signifying his death, so he must have been the one to fight Kyla. But what happened to Kyla if he killed the king?* Chohan had felt Kyla die as they were both a part of that same evil brotherhood that has existed since the beginning of man. *Did they simply kill each other?* He knew there could have been no other way. He kneeled down in the field and uttered a dark oath of vile things, summoning his master.

Shataon appeared before him in an aura of black. He looked down on Chohan, angry to have been summoned.

“What do you want?” he demanded as the ground shook before him. All evil rested inside this dark being.

Chohan prostrated himself before the earth, “O great one, thy power boundless and eternal. I come before thee as thy humble servant to inquire as to what occurred here. Forgive thy servant his intrusions if they do not please thee.”

Shataon smiled darkly at his worthless servant who had sewn so much evil among this people. “You want to know what happened to Kyla, do you? You want to know how he was killed?” he mocked at his servant.

“Surely Dagan couldn’t have killed him, he was much too skilled to be fooled by him,” Chohan said looking up into the eyes of his master.

“Yes he was more skilled than Dagan. But Kyla acted as a fool, his anger getting the best of him. He should have realized that when Dagan was about to die that he would ensure that he went with him.”

“So then they did kill each other,” Chohan said earnestly.

Shataon waved his hand at his slave, “Of course they did, and it was all part of my plan. With both gone, Sammuel will need to pick a new king, placing both him and the new king in the same location.” Chohan nodded understanding, “With both of them in the same location, we can kill both and take over the entire kingdom.”

“Exactly, and this people will fall down and worship me, or they will be destroyed,” Shataon bent down bringing his head level to that of his slave, “and you, shall have all the power in the world.” Chohan’s eyes widened in desire and smiled villainously.

“There is no one in my kingdom I trust more than you, Chohan. I know that you’ll find the new king and kill him and Sammuel.” He again stood up fully.

“How will I find them master? Sammuel could be anywhere in the land right now.”

Shataon looked annoyed at his disciple, “Do you still carry the blood stone with you?”

“Of course master, I never depart without it.”

“Take it out then, hurry!”

Chohan fumbled through his garments until he pulled out a ruby red stone. He showed it to his master with both hands his head bowed down.

“My master, as you requested.”

Shataon looked at him with contempt, knowing that he would never be able to grab the stone if he wanted to. How he longed to have a body of flesh and bones denied him by Him whose name he cannot think. He let his entire dark power gather around him. The earth itself seemed to groan in relief from his absence of presence. He then tried to touch the stone, and from his forefinger all of his darkness excreted. The stone trembled in Chohan’s hands. Blackness seeped through it; the stone trembled and then stopped. The stone was dead and the color of the stone changed to the darkest of black. Black liquid oozed from it into Chohan’s hands. Shataon lowered his hand and his darkness resumed upon the land. Chohan looked at the stone that was oozing from his hands and then looked at his master. Shataon looked satisfied.

“I have changed the blood stone into the dark stone. As long as you have this stone in your hands, you will be able to feel the lightest person in the world and the darkest. Sammuel is the lightest, so when he stops traveling for a few days, you will go to him in a dark portal.”

Chohan pulled the stone in his right hand close to him. He smiled. “Yes, I can feel him even now, traveling from Datgeoss southward. But the darkest person in the world I sense is here, among us.” Shataon nodded, “It means you Chohan. The stone cannot sense me. You alone possess the greatest power of darkness on earth.”

Chohan smiled bigger, “I am the strongest man in the entire world.” Shataon encouraged his worthless servant, “Yes, which is why I trust you with this task more than any other person,” he told him as if he was his only friend in the world.

In truth, Shataon had no real friends, only his followers. Any chance of having any happiness was lost to him. He very well knew of the prophecy, and delighted that the entire people might be destroyed. He wanted others to join him in his misery, for perfect was his misery.

Chohan looked on his friend and master. He knew that all he had was because of him. And it was so simple too, he had just wanted power, and one night he had appeared to him, greeting him as a friend, promising power if he bowed down and worshiped him. And now no person in the world equaled him. Truly the Destroyer was a great name for him. Their entire band looked up to him as their leader. Now he was going to become king of the entire land, and then the world. No one could match his power; to stop him would require a miracle beyond reasoning.

Shataon addressed his disciple, “Now, Chohan, I must go. But remember the consequences if you do not succeed. I will return at the end of the next month.” Chohan looked forlorn because of this warning. *He needs to have more faith in me,* he thought sourly. Shataon vanished suddenly, not surprising Chohan.

Chohan stood up, “Sammuel your blood will be mine,” he promised.

All eyes looked southward to the small town of Nasura and the events that would soon take place.

*Chohan and Shataon (Chapter 4)*

Chohan the Destroyer surveyed the rocky terrain around him as he came through his dark portal. He could not believe it. He had been bested. He clutched his side, his body trembling in pain, his body barely standing. He started to murmur a healing incantation and a purple gas emanated from where the hole in his side was. The flesh started to regrow back to its original state. He collapsed to his knees, his power being spent. He glanced downward and was surprised to see the man he had struck down with lightning, to be there with him. Had he accidentally dragged him through his portal?

He thought of the failed attack and cursed loudly at himself. How could he have been defeated? He was **the Chohan the Destroyer**. He had destroyed many cities in the course of his lifetime, and everyone feared him. He knew the simple farmer had come exceedingly close to ending his life tonight. How could he face his brethren of the order, knowing that he had been bested? He hated no man more than the one who had cast the stone at him, the one who challenged his very power and won. He was infuriated that he could only stand helpless as the stone passed through his barrier. He had the strongest wards and barriers in the world, what form of attack could be possibly strong enough to best him? And that look of that man… He was going to murder him, he knew it. How did he best him, with the bright whirlwind stone? How did it best his barrier? Was his power, somehow, flawed? Was this power he held just an illusion? Ever since he joined the Order, he was told that none could best their power, that the light, held no sway over them. Yet after today’s escapade, how could he not wonder if the light was somehow stronger. Was his master really as strong as he claimed? It’s true that he and made cities burn, taken numberless lives, and also done many great things, but he also never had cause to waver before. Were his previous victories meaningless now that he had been bested? Chohan steeled himself at the very thought of it. *No,* he thought, *I will show them yet. I will surely destroy them all, they caught me unprepared. Now that I know what*

*they are capable of, I can destroy them using my full power. Then I shall rule this kingdom, and all shall fall down and worship me.*

He needed to talk to his master, yet he knew that Shataon had stated that he would again visit him in one month's time, how could he approach his master it being the day after he had told him this? In truth, Shataon scared Chohan down to his very core, and did not wish to summon him at any cost if he could avoid it. When he was around him, all of his childhood fears ran through his heart, as well as every evil thing he had ever perceived; he truly was a terrifying man. Yet Chohan knew that he must, for if he were to attack the camp of the Prophet Sammuel again carelessly, he would indeed fall by the men that protected them.

Chohan recited the dark incantation to summon his master. Shataon appeared before him, affecting the environment with his darkness. Shataon looked annoyed at being summoned, it had been less than a day since he had sent Chohan out to destroy Sammuel and the new king and wasn't expecting to see him for another month.

"Why have you summoned me?!" Shataon demanded.

"My great master, o boundless and great are thy powers, I seek thy aid on my quest to quell the Prophet and the king," Chohan responded.

Shataon looked around, spotting Jedediah lying on the ground, nearly lifeless. He recognized him immediately.

"Who is the boy?" he asked, testing to see if Chohan knew him.

"I know not, only that he has potential to become a powerful sorcerer. He attacked his friends to seek the power that we have."

Shataon looked vaguely intrigued by this, "Interesting. It seems that he could become an ally then. Is he alive?"

Chohan nodded his head, "Barely. I blasted him with black lightning before he had a chance to get out of hand. He was interfering with my mission."

"Oh? Then you've already attacked Sammuel and the new king?"

"Yes… It didn't go as planned."

Shataon was irritated at his failure, "Did anyone die? Or was it a complete failure?"

"The boy took down two of his friends. I hit a girl with a Darkbolt. She won't have survived that."

Shataon retorted, "But no one important died, did they?"

"No sir, but-"

"But nothing! Now that you've shown yourself, they'll be on guard for another attack! You should have waited until you were sure that you could have won the battle! Your own arrogance is what cost you this mission!"

“Now listen here!” Chohan barked, “It was well in my capabilities to destroy everyone at the camp! But I encountered something that I’ve never seen before, even among the strongest Paladins!”

“What did you see?!” Shataon demanded, steeled.

Chohan then explained a full account of what had happened, expounding upon the barrier that the fat young man created, to the sorcery of Jedediah, to the barrier of the Prophets, and finally ending with the bright hurricane stone. Shataon looked disappointed in his worthless slave.

“I curse those Prophets to the same fate I have,” Shataon started, “to think that they’d be able to produce so much power just in their faith and priesthood alone.”

“Is the power of the priesthood stronger than thy power, master?” Chohan inquired, carefully looking at his response.

“OF COURSE NOT, FOOL!!!! MY POWER IS READILY AT HAND!! THOSE MORTAL FOOLS HAVE TO RELY ON **HIS** HELP IF THEY WANT ANYTHING DONE!!! MY POWER IS MY OWN, AND READY TO BE UTILIZED. WE DON’T ABIDE BY THE CHEAP MORAL SYSTEM THAT GUIDE THE OTHERS. I AM THOUSANDS TIMES MORE POWERFUL THAN THEY!!!!!”

“Then it should be no problem to overpass their barrier, right?”

“ARE YOU QUESTIONING ME, FILTH!!!!” Shataon shouted, “I CAN TAKE AWAY YOUR POWER AS EASILY AS I GAVE IT!!!!! DON’T TEST MY PATIENCE!!!!!”

“Can you or can you not help me destroy thy enemies?!” Chohan challenged.

“I can easily destroy those nobodies. I’ve more power than those fools will ever have.”

“So, then what do you suggest I do?”

Shataon thought for a moment, “You’ll have to resort to using an Everlest Circle. It should be more than powerful enough to take them down.”

Chohan protested, “A full Everlest Circle takes hours to prepare! Besides, the user must remain completely stationary when using it. It’s used to take down cities! How am I supposed to utilize one when they are moving? It would be impossible for me to move it.”

“You’ll have to meet them later down the road, prepared. You’ll have plenty of time to prepare one. You need someone to help you when activating the circle. Train the boy you struck down, he should readily come to your aid, once you show him some sorcery and offer to let him join us.”

“The kid is unlearned. He could be wild, we don’t know which side he will join, if he joins at all. It would be stupid for me to take him on such an important mission. I’d rather have Zane pair up with me on the mission, and the kid can join Tritus in learning our path.”

“No,” Shataon objected, “that will be quite unnecessary. I’ve had my eyes on this child for a while now, he will be useful to us. He knows these people best, he knows their weaknesses, how to truly stop them. It would be foolhardy not to spend a few days training him, and taking him with you on your mission.”

Chohan scoffed, “This is not the wisest decision that we could make. I do not doubt my powers, but letting an inexperienced sorcerer tamper with an Everlest circle is going to cause problems. Do you want us to fail?” His eyes narrowed as he looked carefully at the response of his master.

“Do not question me, filth! I am your master! Do you not trust in my abilities?”

“Why should I, before now, I’ve never had reason to doubt your powers. Yet I was stopped, that is a fact. Those Prophets are strong; they might even be stronger than you.”

Shataon was stunned, which he didn’t know that he could be. He had never had a slave outright question his power against the Father’s power. All rage fled out of Shataon, all of it was replaced by silent hatred.

“Without me, you’d be nothing,” Shataon stated, “you know this to be true. Now unless you wish me to remove this immeasurable power-”

Chohan flinched.

“You will obey my commands. For with me, you will achieve greatness.”

Chohan glared at Shataon, and his retort died out. He knew Shataon was right. If he started to disobey him now, he’d be left as a husk, or he’d be killed. He had seen Brothers try to leave in the past, only to be left with a fate worse than death.

“Yes, master,” Chohan said, “I will train the boy as instructed. The prophet will soon fall to us.”

Shataon nodded, pleased to see that this worthless maggot was finally back in place. Soon, all of his enemies would be destroyed and the world would be left to worship him.

*Jedediah and Shaoton and Chohan (Chapter 5)*

Jedidiah slowly woke up. He sat up slowly, looking around. He was in the middle of a dead field, tall yellow grass, and dirt all around him. He clutched his chest, it felt like it was burning. He pulled the front of his shirt down, revealing red and black burns spotted all over his chest.

*What happened?* He wondered as he put his shirt back. He winced in pain as the memories flooded in. He remembered becoming frenzied, unable to control himself. He had pulled out his hunting knife and…

He looked at his hands in horror to see dry blood on his sleeves, and on his hands. He had attacked their group. He had attacked Michael, and then Aaron. Aaron, had he killed him? He winced as he remembered the snaps that had come when he had stepped on Aaron’s chest. Surely he had punctured a lung, or maybe even his heart. If he had lived, there was no way that he’d be able to recover from an injury like that. He would be crippled.

He grit his teeth in frustration. If it hadn’t been for that man, he would’ve never attacked. He was sure that he used a form of magical persuasion to get him to attack the others. There could be no other explanation. He wasn’t a murderer. He was Jedediah, the Mystic.

His anger rose when he thought of that man. The man who had shot a lightning bolt straight through his chest, the man that disposed of Jedediah as soon as his usefulness was at an end. A man that

had forced him to betray his friends. He'd kill him for that. And for killing Aaron as well. He had merely been the tool, the man was the true one to blame.

Jedediah stood up, wondering where he was. It looked like he was nowhere near Nasura. It was colder than he expected it to be, especially since the sun shone brightly overhead. How was he going to get back to the group? Would they even accept him back? They had tried to kill him, but he wasn't the one to blame. No, they'd never accept him back as he was. He'd have to bring back proof of his loyalty.

That man, he'd have to kill him and bring back his head as proof. Jedediah shivered. That man had nearly killed him with a flick of his fingers. In fact, he may have killed their entire party. Could anyone withstand a power so grand, so mystic?

Where was he to go then? Jedediah paced for a few minutes. He'd have to find the nearest city and warn everyone. That sorcerer was bound to take the throne for himself. He had to stop him, even if it killed him.

*Amusing yourself with lies I see,* a voice said.

Jedediah looked around, "Who's there?"

*Jedediah the Mystic, are you? The Mystic of what, sheep? Don't make me laugh*.

Jedediah readied his fists, "Show yourself! I'm not afraid!"

*No? Then why are you trembling?*

Jedediah looked down at his legs. It was true, his knees were wobbling. Was he really afraid? It wasn't the voice that unnerved him. No, he could handle that. It was where it was coming from. It seemed almost to come from…

*Inside your mind?* The voice laughed, *why of course! I'm you, don't you see?*

Jedediah fell to his knees. Next to him, there was a small puddle. He looked at it. He gasped.

There was blood all over his face, blackened and dried. But that's not what surprised him. His right eye had started to change. What was once a black iris had now been tainted with streaks of red.

*This is us now? Don't you see? We've wanted power for so long now, don't you agree? It's finally been given us*.

Jedediah jumped back. Was it his imagination or had his reflection actually spoken back to him, its mouth moving without his?

"How?" Jedediah, "How is this possible?"

*My, my now. Don't be so angry,* the voice taunted, *Isn't this what you wanted? Aren't I the results of your studies every day and night?*

Jedediah hesitated, "No, this wasn't sup-"

*Don't lie to me now! After all, I am you! Yes, the truest part of you too. Don't try to hide me now that I've already acted.*

"What do you mean?" Jedediah asked, horrified.

The voice laughed, *You remember, don't you? What we did to them?*

Flashes of Aaron's and Michael's broken bodies flooded his mind.

"No," Jedediah said in barely more than a whisper, his voice breaking, "That wasn't me. I wouldn't-"

*It was delicious. We had been waiting for so long, trying everything that we could. But **he** was stronger. **He** knew what we did not. And now, we will learn, even what **he** has. And the power shall be ours alone.*

"Go away!" Jedediah shouted, "You're some trick, aren't you! The influence of that man again! I didn't kill anyone! You're his demon!"

*Don't deny who you truly are, Jedediah, who we are!*

Jedediah collapsed to his knees and started screaming. It couldn't be true. He wasn't a murderer. He hadn't attacked his friends. These were all lies.

"BY THE BLOOD OF YESHU, BOY, Why are you screaming?" A man said from behind him.

Jedediah turned his head back. In front of him was the man, the man who had caused all of this. The man was wearing a black robe, the hood pulled back. His skin was sallow, his eyes, yellow. He was quite bald, and it was possible to see blue veins across his face. It was strange. His face looked like it was cracking, almost as if it were made of stone.

"You!" Jedediah shouted as he got up and swung his fist at him, "This is all your fault!"

Chohan snapped his fingers. A purple spark flew from his hand straight into Jedediah's body. Jedediah screamed and writhed in pain. His body dropped to the ground.

Jedediah tried to move his body but couldn't. He looked at the man, his rage building up.

"I can understand why you'd want to attack me," Chohan said, "seeing how we last met, I threw a lightning bolt through you, but please, let's forget about the past."

"What do you want?" Jedediah demanded. "Are you going to kill me, as you did the others?"

"The others?" Chohan smirked, "Ah, that's right. You didn't see how the battle ended."

Chohan clutched his side, remembering the shepherd, the man who had wounded him. His arm trembled in anger.

"I'm afraid that you're little escapade proved more successful than my attack. The only one who died from my attacks are the girl."

"What?" Jedediah asked, "How? You had so much power?"

Chohan kicked Jedediah in the side. Jedediah cried out in pain.

“Don’t question me, filth! Had I wanted to, I could have destroyed all of them with the greatest of ease.”

“Your task was to kill all of us, wasn’t it?” Jedediah challenged, “Yet, here am I, still alive. And so are the others. I wonder if your power was just all showmanship.”

Chohan kicked Jedediah again, a little harder this time. Jedediah squealed in pain.

He opened his hand and black sparks jumped between them. Jedediah looked up at Chohan, the constant sizzling sounded almost like birds chirping to him. Chohan brought his hand down to Jedediah’s face.

*So this is how I die,* Jedediah thought as he closed his eyes and held his breath.

Chohan released the power in his hand and the black lightning dissipated into the air around him.

Jedediah’s eyes shot open, surprised that Chohan had spared him.

Chohan kept his face close to Jedediah’s. His glowing yellow eyes were unstable, the irises bled out into the whites, red veins meeting the points where it bled out. Jedediah could tell that darkness had warped this man’s body. It was the cost of his power.

“As you can see for yourself,” Chohan said, his voice low, barely more than a whisper, “Had I wanted to kill you, I could have done so a hundred times over by now.”

“If you could have killed us,” Jedediah said through gritted teeth, his body still in pain from the shock, “Why didn’t you?”

Chohan pulled back away from Jedediah and sighed, “Since you are going to join us anyway, bravado is useless.”

Jedediah opened his eyes wider, “Join yo-”

“To answer your question,” Chohan interrupted, “the Prophet was much more formidable than I had anticipated. I was caught off guard. I will not be again.”

“The prophet?” Jedediah asked, stunned, “What can he do?”

Chohan chuckled, “Haven’t you been a part of this faith and not known this, boy? These so called miracles don’t spring up from nowhere.”

“Miracles?” Jedediah clarified, “Is that what protected the camp from you?”

Chohan nodded, “I expect so. After all, the three are the most powerful white mages in the world, are they not?”

Jedediah thought for a moment. The Prophet and the Counselors, they had magic enough to stop a man who could destroy him with just a snap of his fingers. Had Gath been right all along? His path to power, to mysticism, had he been searching for it the wrong way?

“My Master has ways to overcome these issues, however,” Chohan smirked, placing his hands behind his back, “He has taken an interest in you, boy.”

“Master?” Jedediah wondered, “With power such as yours, there is someone who commands even you?”

“Commands?” Chohan laughed, “Hardly. He is just our gateway, our portal, our ferryman to the power that we wield.”

“And where is this master, that endeavors so much to have me?”

“He is not like you or I, boy. He is not a man.”

A chill ran down Jedediah’s spine. The Enemy of the Earth, that is who Chohan was referring to. The voice that had invaded his mind returned.

It laughed, *Of course. You knew that already though, didn’t you?*

“Shataon,” Jedediah breathed out, the hairs on his body standing on end.

Chohan’s smile dropped, “It is not advisable to say his name aloud, boy. Especially if you hope to join us. He does not like us to blaspheme his name.”

“So all this time,” Jedediah whispered, tears streaming down his face, “All that I’ve been studying, it’s been coming from him?”

“If you’re display earlier is anything to go off of, then yes, I would say that the Mystic Arts you’ve been dabbling have stemmed from him.”

“But the power of the Earth, the Stars, the people, the animals,” Jedediah countered, “They all have their own po-”

“Who do you think is the God of this Earth, this People?” Chohan retorted, “Who do you think gives victory in war? Provides power to those who lust for it? Who else but the Master would be capable of causing a famine to arise over the face of the Earth, or destroy the fish in the sea? It all belongs to him.”

What this man was saying, it was blasphemy against everything he’d ever been taught. Yeshu had created the Heavens and the Earth, hadn’t he?

“What about Yeshu?” Jedediah asked, “Is what I’ve been taught growing up just a lie?”

Chohan cringed upon hearing the name. Just saying the name alone caused his soul to quiver, his body to shake.

“He may have created everything,” Chohan answered, “But he is not master over it. The world is now the Master’s, and everything in it.”

He knelt down next to Jedediah, “Including your life.”

He stood back up and held his hands up to his sky, “In spite of this fact, He’s offering you all the power he has. All you need to do is join his band, the Brotherhood that has existed since the beginning of man. The Brotherhood of Mahan.”

*Yes, this is what we've been wanting, isn't that right?* The voice in his mind urged him. *This is what we've been looking for. Limitless power.*

"No," Jedediah responded, "This isn't what I wante-"

Chohan stopped him short, "Is that so? If you're not willing to join us, then you'll die right here, right now. Known forever as a traitor to your kin, a murderer, a monster."

"Murderer?" Jedediah asked, horrified, "That wasn't me! That was you who-"

"I have been a member of the Brotherhood of Mahan for over thirty years boy. And I know of no magic that can possess a man to do that which he was unwilling to do. Whether if it was in your carnal mind, or in your thoughts, I know not. But know this, I had no influence in what transpired to your kin."

Jedediah shut his eyes tight. *It can't be true. It all has to be lies. He must have made me! I didn't know what I was doing! I had no control over myself!*

"You had joined us long before that attack, I suspect," Chohan probed him, "Hadn't you, boy? Have you not longed for power, for greatness?"

*Listen to him!* the voice in his mind told him, *This is our opportunity. We have already made our choice. We can die here, powerless, or we can join him, and become unstoppable.*

"Die here now boy, or gain power unmeasured. The choice is yours, boy. I cannot make it for you."

Jedediah hesitated, unsure of what to do.

*Jedediah and Shaoton Finishing Chohan (Chapter 9)*

The air around them was heavy, oppressive—a palpable weight pressing down on Jedediah as he stood over Chohan's broken body. The field was dark, save for the faint glow of embers from the distant fire their battle had left in its wake. Jedediah's chest heaved, each breath sharp with pain and rage. His once-clean tunic was stained with dirt and blood, and his hands trembled as he clenched his fists.

They had barely escaped the prophet Sammuel and his protectors. Jedediah could still hear Jason's voice in his mind, shouting in disbelief as Jedediah's blade turned against him. He could still see Kyle's shocked expression, the confusion and betrayal in Jacob's eyes. It hadn't been his fault—he told himself this over and over. He had no choice. If he hadn't followed Chohan, hadn't done what was demanded of him, he would have died too. Surely they would understand.

But the image of their broken bodies refused to leave him.

Chohan lay sprawled before him, his body mangled and twisted from the conflict with Sammuel's forces and their frantic escape. His arms hung useless at his sides, and his once-fiery yellow eyes were now dimmed, their light extinguished by the gaping void of blindness. His breath came in shallow gasps, his face etched with a primal terror Jedediah had never seen in him before.

"It's over, Chohan," Jedediah said, his voice trembling but resolute. "You've lost."

Chohan's lips parted, his teeth stained red with blood. For a moment, it looked as if he might laugh, but the sound that came out was weak and wheezing. "Lost?" he croaked. "No, Jedediah. This is just the beginning. You've already… made your choice."

Jedediah frowned, stepping closer. "What are you talking about?"

Chohan's head tilted, his blind eyes darting frantically as if searching for something—someone. "Shataon," he gasped, his voice trembling with desperation. "Master, help me!"

The words sent a chill through Jedediah, but he pushed the unease aside. His focus sharpened, a strange sense of purpose building within him. "He's not coming," Jedediah said, his tone low but steady. "Your time is done. You've brought nothing but ruin and death. Someone has to end this."

Chohan's breathing quickened, his chest rising and falling with shallow, panicked gasps. "Master!" he cried again, his voice cracking. "I've served you! Don't abandon me now!"

Jedediah's fists tightened, his knuckles white. He had followed Chohan because he thought it was the only way to survive, the only way to keep living long enough to make things right. But seeing Chohan now—a broken, pleading shadow of the man who had commanded such fear—Jedediah felt nothing but disgust. For Chohan. For himself.

"Chohan," Jedediah said, his voice firming. "You've terrorized and destroyed for too long. It's over. Someone has to put an end to this cycle of destruction, and if it has to be me, so be it."

Chohan's head snapped toward him, his blind eyes wide and wild. "You think you can take my place?" he hissed, his voice trembling with rage and fear. "You're nothing, Jedediah. Nothing without him."

"I don't need him," Jedediah replied, his voice cracking with emotion. "I don't need his power. I just need to do what's right."

But even as he said it, doubt clawed at the edges of his resolve. Could he ever truly make things right? Could he ever undo the damage he had caused?

Chohan's body trembled, his hands clawing weakly at the air. His face twisted with a mix of desperation and disbelief. "Shataon!" he screamed, his voice breaking. "Don't let him—don't let him take what's mine!"

Jedediah stepped back, his heart pounding as he watched Chohan descend further into madness. The man's chest heaved, his breath coming in frantic gasps. Jedediah could feel the weight of the moment pressing down on him, but he steeled himself.

"It's not yours anymore," Jedediah said quietly. "It never was."

Chohan's convulsions grew more violent, his body writhing as if caught in some unseen vice. Jedediah flinched as Chohan's screams turned into choked gasps, his hands clutching at his chest. The terror in his expression deepened, his mouth opening in a final, soundless cry.

Then, silence.

Chohan's body went still, his twisted frame collapsing into the dirt. Jedediah stared down at him, his breath coming in uneven bursts. The embers around them flickered faintly, casting long shadows over the scene.

Jedediah swallowed hard, a strange mix of relief and unease settling over him. He had done what needed to be done, hadn't he? Chohan was gone. The Destroyer was no more. And yet, as he turned away from the lifeless body, a quiet voice whispered in the back of his mind.

*The Destroyer must rise.*

Jedediah's steps faltered, but he forced himself forward, away from the ashes of the past and into the uncertain future. He told himself he was doing the right thing. The path ahead was dark, but he would walk it.

For now, the burden was his to bear.